Athens and Sparta, two city states in what would become the united country of Greece, were wildly different from each other. Sparta was far more oriented on military strength than Athens and fought many battles with other city-states. Athens had more focus on strategy in their battles, and fought less with their neighbors. Another of the main differences between them was how their societies treated women. Women in Sparta were more respected than women in Athens, and were entrusted with more responsibilities.

Women in the two societies had completely different roles and educations, In Sparta, women were taught to read and write and could participate in sports like the men. In that respect, they were treated more as equals to the men. Their training, as they were expected to be able to defend themselves, was just as brutal as the men’s and the two would compete against each other. In Athens, however, they were not educated like the men were and could not participate in sports. Instead, they were expected to stay in their homes and learn from their mothers. Their lessons mostly included how to weave and look after the home. A quote from one Athenian, Menander, is “Teaching a woman to read and write? What a terrible thing to do! Like feeding a vile snake on more poison.” Spartan women had many of the same rights as the men did, though not all, while the Athenian women had next to no rights. They could not speak for themselves in fair counsel, nor could they understand much of what the men said because of their lack of an education.

Furthermore, Athenian women were considered property of their husbands and could neither vote nor own property, whilst Spartan women were their own people and could own their own land. In Athens, the entire role of women was to be controlled by the men of the house, be it their father or their spouse. Once married, they were duty bound to obey their husband’s every order. As such, they automatically went along with whatever decisions their husbands came up with. Spartan women, while they could not vote either, certainly had more say in whatever choices the men had to make. They could argue with their spouses over which candidate to choose in the elections while Athenian women had no such freedom. They were under the complete control of the men, and could not even watch over their land while the men were away. That right was not one of the few that Athenian women possessed. Ownership of property went from father to son, and women could act only as placeholders if the child was not old enough. Spartan women, on the other hand, could have their own property and live on it. Because the men were away so much, they also became the dominant figures in the household as well. Their children would almost never see their father, as he was away to war so much, so when he would return the man would have little to no power over his family. “Female domestic power” in Sparta, as Sue Blundell states, “was accepted and possibly even officially encouraged.”

The goals of society for the women were also different—in Athens the goal was simply to have the women supply heirs for the men, while in Sparta what society wanted was for the women to bear strong sons. For that to happen, the women needed to be strong as well, so they were more trained physically and mentally than Athenian women. The domestic arts, such as spinning, weaving, and mending, were left to the lower classes such as the helots, the slave laborers,or perioeci, the free but non-citizen people. Such things were considered important, for the woman of the house needed to know how to perform such things, but not vitally. In Athens, however, the domestic arts were considered nearly the most important things are girl would learn in her lifetime. All other education was neglected as she learned how to look after the home she would be given to. Slave women, too, were educated in this, so that they could assist the dominant woman look after the home and help to raise the children she bore. Spartan women would undoubtedly have the stronger body, as they were given training , so they were more likely to bear healthy children and not die in the process. Their worth was more acknowledged than in Athens, where women were expected to be quiet and produce children.